



# Making His Way With Words

As a poet, novelist, and popular lecturer, Paul Laurence Dunbar used his extraordinary way with words to achieve international fame. In just ten years, Dunbar rose from a job running a downtown Dayton elevator to receiving an invitation to President McKinley’s inauguration.

In 1903, the 30-year-old author returned to his hometown after a decade of living in New York, Washington, D.C., and Denver. In 1891, Dunbar had been the sole African American graduate at Dayton’s Central High School, where he was a classmate and friend of Orville Wright.



## Paul Laurence Dunbar



At the age of 18, Dunbar began a newspaper for African Americans, the *Dayton Tattler*. Wilbur and Orville Wright printed the paper at their nearby print shop.



Dunbar’s first published book of poems, *Oak and Ivy*, sold for a dollar each. When asked why such a small book had such a hefty price, he replied, “A book sells on its merits, sir, not on its size.”



In the 1890s, Dunbar was one of the first African American writers to be widely read by whites.